

## [A Prospector's Experience]

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A Prospector's Experience

"A man gets some queer ideas, in his head when he's out all alone in the mountains", said John Sanderson, "half of them believe in ghosts, nine out of ten in signs and all of them in luck. My own experience has changed my views in a good many particulars, and for one thing, it has made me a firm believer in special providences. It didn't come about gradually but through as marvelous escape from an awful death as I believe ever falls to man!"

"I had a pet theory then that if you followed the creek's up high enough you would find a tremendous deposit of gold in decomposed quartz. I talked the thing up to Charlie Burk, another prospector , and of mine, until he agreed to put up half of the outfit and join me in the search. We got a couple of burros, the necessary tools , and started early in the spring."

"The country in the Black Range is about as wild and desolate as any on earth, and it was a trip that nothing but faith and enthusiasm would prompt a man to attempt. It was one succession of gorges, gulches, and acculities acclivities , all strewn with granite boulders

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from the size of a man's hand to a four story block, and often we were obliged to leave the water course that we were following and make detours that took day's at the time."

"The creek we followed was almost dry and we stopped frequently looking for placers. We found no very rich ones, but every where there was gold. Sometimes there would be lots of it in the bottom of the tin cup after we had taken a drink, and sometimes, (here is a curious thing, it would be floating on the surface. I will let some one who is better posted in science than I, tell why gold now and then floats, but I only know that little flakes of it do, and a lot of it is lost in sluice mining that way. As long as we found placers we knew that the main deposit was ahead, so we pushed along, tired enough but confident."

"At last we came to a spot where the sand was barren for several day's journey, and then we begin to prospect the country around. To make a long story short we struck a ledge one morning with outcroppings that crumbled under my pick and showed quartz all streaked with yellow threads."

"Charlie," I yelled out, all afire at once, "we have struck it!" "But before we sunk a shaft we found something else that sent our hearts to our mouths. It was an old shaft, back a little and in a claim properly staked out that covered that very ledge. There was a notification according to law on one of the posts, that Peter Sumner and Joseph Keautzy had taken possession of the Big Six and done the legal assessment work. I sat right down and collapsed but Charlie went over the shaft and came back to tell me that it didn't cover half the amount necessary, under the law to hold the property for the year. We measured it and sure enough, it was down only about one-half the required distance so we took possession of the property, changed its name to "The Treasury", and went to work."

"We built ourselves a rough shanty, rigged up a [windless?] and began to sink. In a few day's we were in a formation rich enough to make a man's head swim, and [just?] getting better as we went down. We were both so excited that we begrudged the time to sleep and eat, and we neither of us meditated for an instant giving the claim up to anybody,

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assessment work, or no assessment work. What had become of the two men was a mystery. They had left no trace except the notification board and shaft, and it gave me the creeps now and then to think that they might be dead.

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“But we were not in a frame of mind to let sentiment interfere with buisness. I supose we had been there a couple of weeks when provisions began to run short. We didn't want to both leave the claim at once so it was finally arranged that Charlie would go down the creek about fifty miles to a camp and get supplies. He took the two burros and started off. I calculated that it would take him a week to make a trip, and time hung heavy on my hands. I tried to work a little on the shaft. The formation we was very hard and we had rigged up a sort of a cross-bar ladder. I would go down this, fill the buckedt, climb to the surface and pull it up.”

“About noon of the second day after he left I was startled at what I thought was a man crossing a little gulch a half a mile away. I only had a view of it between two rocks, and whatever it was it passed so quickly that I was not sure. However, I waited for a couple of hours, and then seeing nothing further concluded I was mistaken and I went down into the shaft. I filled the bucket with very heavy ore climbed up and had it about half raised when a man came walking up the creek bed toward me. Then I knew that I was right before.”

“He was a an ugly looking customer, big and brawny with a flat, Scandinavin face, and carried a Winchester on his arm. I had a little stick that I slipped into the windlass handle near the axle to keep it from turning backward and leaving the bucket just where it was suspended half way up. I started towards the cabin to get my arms. He covered me with his repeating rifle and ordered me to halt.”

“What are you doing on my claim?” he said. “I reckon you can see”. I replied, pulling as good a face on it as I possibly could.”

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"Do you mean you jumped it, you cursed thief?" "No, I don't, there wasn't enough work on it to hold it, and it was as much mine as anybody's."

"You lie!" He looked at me for over a minute with his wicked greenish eyes for a full minute, then he said: "Did you ever pray?"

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"Yes" I faltered. "Then pray now, I'll give you two [minuted?] to do it". By that time my mind was clear enough to take in the whole situation, I had no doubt he intended to murder me then and there. With me out of the way there would be no one to testify to the insufficient work, and I would simply be [?] regarded on hisstory but when my death was told as claim jumper who had justly been dealt with. I felt my knees trmble and tried another trick.

"If you kill me," I said "my partner will be back and see that you hang for it." "I'll fix your partner the same way, you claim-jumping cur."

"True enough nothing would be easier than to assassinate Burk on his return, and we had so jealously guarded the secret of our trip that no one would know where to search for us. We would simply disappear, as hundreds of prospector's do, never to be seen by man again, and speedily to be forgotten. "I had no hope of mercy from the instant I looked into the man's cruel face. I felt with a sickening qualm and a wild-drumming in my ears that my time had come."

"Oh! For heavens sake don't murder me". I cried "I will go." The man made no reply. For a moment my head swam, and then with a sudden return of vision that was excrucating in it's clearness, I saw him stoop slightly, rest the gun barrell over the windlass handle, and marked even the slight contraction of the eye-lid that always preceeds a shot."

"The next instant there was a crash, an explosion and a cry all mingled into one. I saw the man turning head over heels sown down the embankment, the winchester flying through a cloud of smoke up into the air, and all the while I heard a loud, monotonous whirrling noise

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that was like some gigantic clock running down. I did not realize it at the time but this is what happened.

“When he rested his gun on the windlass he dropped his barrell right 5 across the little stick I had thrust in to prevent it lumbling and knocked it out I suppose the bucket of ore weighed one-hundred fifty pounds, and the great iron handle swinging clear around with such terriffic movement, that when it struck him square in the face, which it did, it lifted him off of his feet like a cannon ball. The gun was discharged by the shock but the bullet went nowhere near me. Before I regained my senses I heard the bucket hit the bottom with a smash?”

“When I picked up the man he was unconcious, but moaning a little, and the blood tricked on his ears, and his gun was broken. He lay at the cabin for a week or two and after Charlie returned we took him to Silver City. There Dr. Slough put his face in a sort of plaster of paris cast but although the wound healed he was out of his head and eventually died. The night before he passed away he motioned for a little slate he used to write on for he couldn't speak. He was very weak, and it took him a long time but at last he scrawled—“Who hit me?” Before they could tell him he fainted away.

“I sold my half of the claim a short time after the accident, the mine played out in about a year.”